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BRER RABBIT IN THE FOLK-TALES OF THE NEGRO AND OTHER RACES

In the character of the old negro, Uncle Remus, is embodied one of the most lovable creations in recent literature and one of the most valuable contributions our country has yet made to the literature of the world. Both young and old, as they read these tales, feel themselves drawn very close to the old man, whose humble cabin and warm heart were ever open as a haven of refuge to the little boy; and with the youngster come to share in the venerable negro's ready sympathy, to enjoy his quaint and genial humor, and to admire his simple, child-like faith in humanity and in God. If older readers have sometimes smiled at his assumption of affectionate superiority over his little companion and friend, at his social prejudices, his class distinctions, and his family pride, they have nevertheless been filled with admiration for his courtly manners and his loyalty and devotion to Ol' Massa and Ol' Missus, and to all the principles of conduct he imbibed from his free and familiar, yet ever respectful, intercourse with them. The character of Uncle Remus, then, lives and will continue to live in literature because of its essentially human qualities; for, without any foolish sentiment or silly gush, the simple old negro is portrayed with a vividness, truth, and sympathy that obliterate the color line and lead us to accept the old darky as a fellow-man close akin to ourselves. Just in this fact, it seems to me, appear the literary art of Mr. Harris and his greatest achievement.

Not for its individual traits alone, however, is the character valuable, but for its representative qualities, summing up the best characteristics of the negro race at a special period in its history—the time of its slavery—the very traces of which have almost entirely disappeared. If *Uncle Tom's Cabin* set forth to the world the darkest aspects of slavery, *Uncle Remus* represents its brightest side, for the book makes clear to every thoughtful reader that the system of slavery, pernicious as it may appear to us now, took the dusky savage from his haunts in the African jungle and made of him a Christian and a gentleman, something which freedom and the most improved methods of education have thus far failed to accomplish.

Thus, as the years go by, Mr. Harris's book will grow more and more valuable as a historic picture of a type now fast passing away. In place of the negro's gaiety and light-heartedness have come disturbing dreams of social equality, so that all the old stories he used to tell of Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit, all the old songs he used to sing to the banjo in those happy, care-free days on the plantation, are not preserved as a heritage by this latter generation, but are scornfully put aside as childish things, unworthy relics of their days of darkness.

Whatever the negro may become, he will certainly never again possess that picturesque charm which belonged to his manner of speech and action in the days before the Civil War. So completely has the negro changed, that looking at certain modern types in the South, it is almost as difficult to credit the negro at any age with the dignity and decorum attributed to him by Nelson Page and others, as it is to reconcile the Indian of the modern reservation with the noble and chivalrous Chingachgook and Uncas of Fenimore Cooper.

Southern writers have been quick to feel this change and have striven to select and perpetuate in literature the most characteristic and poetic features of this negro race in the days of its slavery. About 1878 the negro made his first appearance in literature in a little poem by Irwin Russell, entitled *Christmas Night in the Quarters*, a poem which marks a new epoch in the literature of the South. In 1880, two years later, Joel Chandler Harris brought out his now classic volume, *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings*, in which he not only delineated with vividness and fidelity the life of the negro, but, as has been already indicated, added a new character to the world's literature. Thus Uncle Remus was the pioneer of his race in literature, and on his footsteps followed a host of other minor characters as depicted in the books of such writers as Thomas Nelson Page, Harry Stillwell Edwards, and Ruth McEnery Stuart. The pictures these authors have drawn of the old-time darky will retain a permanent place in literature beside the equally interesting, though more highly idealized, Indians of Fenimore Cooper.

But these tales of Uncle Remus, as scholars have long been aware, and as Mr. Harris himself was prompt to acknowledge, are not original with Uncle Remus, nor with any other negro, nor did Mr. Harris himself compose them. Like the early epic

of a race and like other folk-tales of a people, they are the result of long and gradual growth, having been handed down orally from one generation to another, and, in their present form at least, not committed to writing till the genius of Mr. Harris discovered them and preserved them to posterity. Just as the Brothers Grimm collected and arranged the German folk-tales that appear in their name, and just as Bishop Percy in the middle of the eighteenth century gathered up the old English ballads, which, neglected for centuries, then became the direct inspiration of Scott, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and formed one of the creative impulses of the romantic movement, so Mr. Harris, from the lips of former slaves, took down these negro tales and arranged them in artistic form, so that they became an important part of the newly awakening literature of his section of the country. In every instance, the material for a long time was considered unworthy of publication or even of serious attention. Thus, though Mr. Harris did not compose these stories, he showed fine penetrative insight in recognizing their value in literature as folk-tales of varied and unusual interest, and he displayed great literary ability in the manner in which he put them together and preserved them for future generations.

Noteworthy as these Uncle Remus tales are as a contribution to literature, they are no less so as a contribution to the folklore of the negro race, in revealing their strange superstitions and childish beliefs and their primitive processes of thought. Through these stories of a people removed by only a few generations from barbarism, we are carried back almost to the infancy of mankind, to a period when it was no fable for animals to converse with one another or with human beings, when even images of wax or clay or tar might readily be endowed with living personality, and when men felt a close kinship with animals, with inanimate objects, and with all created things. Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer B'ar, Brer Coon and Brer Possum were all members of a great fraternity, to which man also belonged. Even Sis Tar Baby herself was invested with a unique personality of her own, and was spoken to in polite and respectful manner.¹

To those who have chased the "timorous flying hare," how-

¹ *The Childhood of Fiction*, J. Macculloch, London, 1905, p. 199f.

ever, it might seem strange indeed that such a purblind wretch should appear as the hero of these Uncle Remus tales, instead of the cunning fox. Yet the choice of the hero lay not with Mr. Harris himself, nor was any individual negro responsible, for only a casual examination of the folk-tales of Africa, of the Indians of North America, and even of distant Asia, will reveal the fact that the rabbit is the hero common to them all. Though his great staring eyes might have suggested stupidity (of which he is taken as a type by Chaucer and other English poets), his wonderful swiftness in running, his constant vigilance, his skill in dodging his pursuers, his tendency to appear suddenly and silently at unexpected moments, either in the early dawn or in the gathering dusk, these and other characteristics, in the eyes of ignorant and superstitious folk, served to invest him with uncanny and preternatural powers. Thus, in the ancient Druidical mysteries, the hare was used in the auguries to indicate the outcome of a war²; in Scottish and Irish folk-lore he is associated with witches; and possibly on account of such evil associations, he is, in certain parts of Brittany and Russia, an object of aversion and disgust.³ Moreover, the superstition that it is unlucky for a hare to cross one's path is widespread, being found not only among the negroes of America and Africa, but also among the Indians, Laplanders, and Arabs, and lingers even yet in parts of England.⁴

At the same time, however, his supposed magic powers have exalted him to a central place in the myths and folk-tales of many different countries, and even in our own day throughout Germany and other parts of Europe and also in America, he has come to be connected with one of the greatest festivals of the church.⁵ To many a German child of to-day the *Osterhase*, instead of being an uncanny or unlucky animal, is a mysterious and beneficent creature with attributes akin to Santa Claus and even to the *Christkind*. And the wonderful power of the rabbit's foot in bringing good luck to whoever carries it on his person is not peculiar to negroes, but even among people of superior in-

² *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, Marie Trevelyan, London, 1909, pp. 77-78.

³ *An Introduction to Folk-Lore*, Marian Roalfe Cox, London, 1904, p. 91; *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland*, Jeremiah Curtin, Boston, 1890, p. 121.

⁴ Cox, p. 109.

⁵ Cox, p. 31.

telligence is a common belief in America, as well as in England. Nor does it seem to be a purely vulgar superstition borrowed from the negro slaves.

In view of these facts it may be of interest to trace the character of the rabbit, or hare, through certain typical folk-tales of different countries and to show how the rabbit appears, first as a semi-divine being, either the incarnation of some god or the mythical, ancestral culture-hero of a people; and next on a far lower plane as a great rogue animal, the picaresque hero of a widespread beast-epic. At the same time an attempt will be made to account for his decline in character from divinity to roguery.

Among the *jatakas*, or birth-stories of Buddha, which, it is believed, date ultimately from a period several centuries before the beginning of the Christian era, there appears a tale in which the hare is identified with the god Buddha himself and is exalted to a conspicuous place on the shining disc of the full moon.

According to the faithful, Buddha is said to have been incarnated as many as five hundred and fifty times, and is believed to have retained the memories not of one life only but of all the varied types of existence through which he had passed. On one occasion, it seems, Buddha was born among the hare-kind and lived with his three friends, the otter, the jackal, and the monkey.⁶ These four wise creatures dwelt amicably together, and the hare, the wisest of them all, preached the truth to his companions and urged upon them the necessity and duty of alms-giving and of observing holy days.

One evening, the Bodhisatta, as he was then called (i. e., one about to become a Buddha, or a Buddha-elect), glancing up at the moon, perceived that the next day would be a feast day and urged his companions to observe it and feed from their own tables any beggars that should apply to them for food.

When the morning comes, the otter discovers a string of seven red fish buried in the sand and lays them aside; the jackal saves up some lizards and a pot of curds; and the monkey stores

⁶ *The Jataka, or Stories of Buddha's Former Births*. Translated from the Pali by various hands under the editorship of Professor E. B. Cowell, Vol. 3, p. 35, No. 316, *Sasa-Jataka*. See also *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, Baring-Gould, Longman's, 1897, p. 203.

away some mangoes. But the hare, browsing in the soft *kuça* grass, reflects that he has no oil or rice to offer to any beggars that may chance to appear, and hence he resolves to give his own flesh to be eaten if occasion should arise.

At such a splendid display of virtue, Indra's white marble throne manifests signs of heat, and Indra determines to test the unselfishness of the hare. Disguised as a brahmin, he comes to the otter, who offers him his fish; then to the jackal, who is ready to give him his lizards and curds, just as the monkey is equally willing to furnish mangoes to the supposed begging priest. But the hare greets him with joy and at once offers his own body for food.

"You shall not need to break the moral law by taking my life," he declares. "I will give you my body to roast and eat.

"Nor sesame, nor beans, nor rice have I as food to give;
But roast with fire my flesh I yield, if thou with us would'st live."

Through his miraculous power, the brahmin causes a heap of burning coals to appear, and the hare, rising immediately from his bed of *kuça* grass and shaking himself three times, lest any insects might cling to his fur and be consumed, springs up like a royal swan (one translator says, "like a flamingo"), lighting on a heap of lotuses, and falls upon the burning coals. But, to his amazement, not a hair of his body is singed. It was as if he had entered the regions of frost and snow.

Indra then reveals himself and explains that he has come only to put the Bodhisatta's virtue to the test. As a perpetual memorial of Buddha's wonderful self-sacrifice, Indra "squeezed the mountain (i. e., the Himavat, or Himalaya, which according to Hindoo tradition was selected as the calf, or recipient of all good things, and thus contained the essence of all the earth's goodness), and with the essence extracted daubed the surface of the moon with the figure of a hare," which may plainly be seen there to this day.⁷

Thus we read in another *jataka* (No. 20) "the sign of the hare in the moon will last a whole kalpa" (i. e., as long as the world endures).

⁷ *Folk-Lore Journal*, vol. 2 (1884), p. 370, "Folk-Tales of India," Richard Morris.

Familiar as the man in the moon is to us western folk, the hare in the moon is still more familiar to the people of the far east, and the hare is the older of the two. To the common people of India and Ceylon the moon spots form the figure of a hare, and hence the moon in Hindoo works is called *sasanka*, or "hare-marked."⁸ In a later version of this Buddha story, as might be expected, it is not Buddha in the form of a hare that offers himself as a sacrifice, but the hare itself, who meets Buddha (then dwelling on earth as a hermit) lost in the wood, guides him into the right path, offers his own body to appease the hunger of the supposed hermit, and as a memorial has his figure miraculously impressed on the moon's surface.⁹

This same story is common among the Kalmucs of Tartary, with whom the hare is a god, called Sakya-Muni, or the Buddha, and the Mongolians also see in the moon shadows the figure of a hare. They relate that "Bogdo-Jagjamuni, or Shigemuni (i.e., the Buddha Sakya-Muni), the supreme ruler of the sky, once transformed himself into a hare to serve as food for a starving traveler, in honor of which meritorious deed, Khomusta, whom the Mongols revere as chief of the *tengri* (genii), placed the figure of a hare in the moon."¹⁰

In the early folk-lore of China, too, the lunar hare is a prominent figure, and is said to squat at the foot of the cassia tree, pounding for the genii the drugs out of which the elixir of immortality is made. The idea is probably connected with the Buddhist incarnation already alluded to, for some authorities identify the cassia tree with the sal tree, one of the sacred trees of the Buddhists. In the Taoist legend of Rip Van Winkle, Wang Chih, who like Rip goes off into the mountain and sleeps for a long period, is carried by a great white crane up to the moon, where he finds the Hare of the Moon pounding his drugs. The Hare of the Moon is said to live a thousand years, and when he is five hundred years old he changes his color from brown to

⁸ *Moon-Lore*, Timothy Harley, London, 1885, p. 64; *Folk-Lore of Northern India*, W. Crooke, 2 vols., Westminster, 1896, I, 13; *Zoological Mythology*, Angelo de Gubernatis, 2 vols., London, 1872, II, chap. 8.

Teutonic Mythology, Grimm (Stallybrass), vol. 2, p. 716; Harley, *Moon-Lore*, 63.

¹⁰ Grimm and Harley, l. c.

white.¹¹ From this wondrous beast Wang Chih receives a few drops of the elixir of life and thus, far more fortunate than poor Rip, is restored to youth and to his long-lost family.¹²

Timothy Harley, in his *Moon-Lore*, quotes from an unnamed Chinese scholar, who declared that "tradition earlier than the period of the Han dynasty (206 B. C. to the first century of the Christian era), asserted that a hare inhabited the surface of the moon." And Tu Fu, a bard of the T'ang dynasty (618 A. D. to 907 A. D.) celebrates this wondrous hare in song:

The frog is drowned in the river;
But the medicine hare lives forever.

Thus in China, as well as in India, the hare is regarded as a divine animal.¹³

A myth of the Ainos, or Ainus—the aborigines of Japan, who it is now generally admitted are not Mongolians, but are closely related to the Caucasians—ascribes the origin of the hares to snowballs, out of which they were miraculously formed. As told by Mr. B. H. Chamberlain, in a literal translation from the original, the story runs as follows:¹⁴

"Suddenly there was a large house on top of the hill, wherein were six persons beautifully arrayed, but constantly quarreling. Whence they came was unknown. Thereupon Okikurumi (the god) came and said: 'Oh, you bad hares! You wicked hares! Who should not know your origin? The children in the sky were pelting each other with snowballs, and the snowballs fell into this world of men. As it would have been a pity to waste heaven's snow, the snowballs were turned into hares, and those hares

¹¹ This change of color in the fur of the arctic hare is a well-known phenomenon.

¹² "Chinese Folk-Lore and Some Western Analogues," Frederick Wells Williams (*Annual Report of the Smithsonian Inst.*, 1900, p. 591); *The Jewelled Sea: A Book of Chinese Fairy Tales*, Hartwell James, Phila., 1906.

¹³ Harley, p.p. 63-64; *Folk-Medicine*, W. G. Black, London, 1883 (*Folk-Lore Soc. Pub.*, 12, 154); *The Folk-Lore of China*, N. B. Dennys, London, 1876, p. 64.

¹⁴ *Aino Folk Tales*, B. H. Chamberlain (*Folk-Lore Soc. Pub.*, 22 [1888], p. xxii; p. 9, No. V). See also *The Ainos of Japan*, Hitchcock (*Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus.*, 1890, pp. 429-502; *Prehistoric Japan*, E. Baelz, *Smithson. Inst. Rep.*, 1907, pp. 524-547).

are you. You who live in this world which belongs to me should not quarrel. What is it that you are making such a noise about?' With these words, Okikurumi seized a firebrand and beat each one of the six in turn. Thereupon all the hares ran away. This is the origin of the hare (-god), and for this reason the body of the hare is white, because made of snow, while its ears, which are the part where it was charred by the fire, are black."

This same belief in the hare in the moon seems to have penetrated into Europe, for a writer in the *Cornhill Magazine* for 1882, p. 440, on "Some Solar and Lunar Myths," reports that "in Swabia children are not allowed, in imitation of the hare in the moon, to make the figure of a hare on the wall with their fingers." Indeed, this same superstitious fear of the hare in the moon is common to the children and ignorant folk throughout central Germany and many parts of Hungary.

Before dismissing this side of the subject, the divinity of the hare, it may be of interest to pass across into the New World and glance rapidly at some of the myths of the Red Indians, in which this same deification takes place, and, remarkable to relate, the same association with the moon. Among the Algonquians, for example, the Ancestral Hare, from whom all their tribes claim a common origin, is the grandson of the Moon and son of the West Wind. Michabo (from *Michi*, great, and *wabos*, rabbit), with its variants—Manabush and Manabozo—the great White Hare, is the semi-divine ancestor of the tribe, the culture-hero, who, like Hiawatha, taught his people all the arts of peace. Through etymological confusion of *Wabos*, rabbit, and *wabun*, dawn, it is believed by some that this great White Rabbit was no less than the incarnation of the eastern dawn. At all events, he is identified with both light and fire, and in some myths is, like Prometheus, the Fire-Bringer, and is the great "Wonder-worker of all the tribes east of the Mississippi from Hudson Bay to the Gulf."¹⁵ He even creates fire and light for his people. Even more than that, he it is who, left by a great flood floating on a raft with a few other animals, is the recognized captain and chief of them all, and out of tiny pieces of mud brought up from

¹⁵ 19th Annual Rep. U. S. Bureau Ethnology, p. 232; 16th Annual Rep., pp. 236; 14th Annual Rep., part I, pp. 87, 117, 125, 206; part 2, p. 1051; *American Hero Myths*, D. G. Brinton, p. 66.

the bottom by the muskrat on her paws, created the world itself; then formed men out of the drowned bodies of the animals, which afterwards became the totems of the tribes; next shot his arrows into the soil, so that they grew into tree trunks; and, finally, by watching the spiders weaving their webs, taught his people how to make nets with which to catch fish.¹⁶

Among the Utes there is a myth of a fierce conflict between Ta-vwats, the Hare God, and Ta-vi, the Sun God, in which the Hare God, by means of a magic arrow, shivers the sun into a thousand fragments and causes a general conflagration.¹⁷ And the Iriquoian cosmology relates how the Hare, in company with Sapling (Hero-Sprout), Beaver, and Otter, goes to capture the Sun, and how the Hare seizes the great luminary and flees away with him in his canoe.¹⁸ Far up in British Columbia, the Thompson River Indians, like the Buddhists, see the shape of a hare in the moon, and account for its presence there by a fantastic myth, which relates how the Moon, formerly a white-faced, handsome young Indian, invites all the stars to his house, and when the guests arrive, sends his younger sister, the Hare, to fetch water. Returning with a bucket in each hand, she finds no place to sit, until her brother says, "Sit here on my face, for there is no room elsewhere." His sister, taking him at his word, jumped on his face. "If the Moon had not joked thus, he would now be much brighter, for his sister may still be seen sitting on his face, dimming his brightness."¹⁹

Strangely similar is the Tezcucan (Mexican) account of the creation, as given by Bancroft,²⁰ according to which "the sun and the moon came out equally bright, but this not seeming good to the gods, one of them took a rabbit by the heels and slung it into the face of the moon, dimming its lustre with a blotch, whose mark may be seen to this day"—an unwilling and undeserved apotheosis, in strong contrast to that of Buddha.

¹⁶ *American Hero Myths*, D. G. Brinton, p. 39.

¹⁷ *1st Annual Report U. S. Bureau Ethnol.*, p. 24.

¹⁸ *21st Annual Rep. U. S. Bureau Ethnol.* p. 318.

¹⁹ *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians*, James Teit, (*Memoirs Amer. Folk-Lore Soc.*, 1898, p. 91).

²⁰ *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, New York, 1875, vol. 3, p. 62 (quoted by Harley, *Moon-Lore*, p. 66); see also Cox, *Intro. to Folk-Lore*, p. 250.

And among the Nahuas of ancient Mexico Professor D. G. Brinton found the same myth of the rabbit in the moon. "It (the figure in the moon) was called Tochtli, the rabbit, and the name was applied to one of the four types under which the years were grouped in the Aztec cycle."²¹

It is a matter of some interest that the Chinese also included the rabbit among their twelve "cyclical animals," by which they marked out the "yellow road" of the sun, and the same circle was adopted by Tartars, Turks, and Mongols, in Tibet, Tong-King, Japan, and Korea. Even to this day these zodiacal creatures appear in the almanacs of Central Asia. Of these Chinese animals, the Hare (or Rabbit), Monkey, Dog, and Serpent reappeared without change in the Aztec calendar.²²

Returning now to India, we find in the *Pantschatantra* and in the *Hitopadesa*²³ two favorite and widespread stories, which seem to indicate the beginning of the decline of the rabbit's character from god to trickster. The first story tells how in a time of drought the King of the Elephants brings his herd to disport in a beautiful pool of crystal water, and how day after day they tread under foot numbers of hares that had long dwelt on the banks of the pool. At last, grown desperate, one of the hares, Godspeed by name, goes out to meet the Elephant King, and, addressing him from the top of a high hill, tells the Lord of the Herd that he, Godspeed, has been sent as ambassador from his Godship, the Moon, to protest against the continual destruction of the hares.

"Thus saith the Moon: 'These hares were the guardians of my pool (Candrasara, or Lake of the Moon), and thine elephants coming thither have scared them away. This is not well. Am I not Sasanka ('Hare-Marked'), whose banner bears a hare, and are not these hares my votaries?' "

At this the Elephant King in great trepidation goes with the hare to the edge of the pool, where the image of the moon was

²¹ Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, p. 197, note; also *Journal of Amer. Folk-Lore*, vol. 3, p. 12.

²² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed., "Zodiac," vol. 24, p. 793.

²³ Angelo de Gubernatis, vol. 2, chap. 8; *Literature of the Orient*, Euphаний Wilson, London and Paris and New York, *Hindu Literature*, p. 55; Benfey, *Pantschatantra*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1859.

quivering, and along with his herd makes prostrations, begging pardon of the Moon, the hare explaining to the Moon that their crime had been committed in ignorance. Whereupon, they got their dismissal and left the hares in undisturbed possession of the pool.

In the second story, ²⁴ a lion, Fierce-of-Heart, was accustomed to exact of the other animals one beast a day for his meal. When the hare's turn came, he aroused the lion's pride and anger by telling him of a rival near at hand, mightier than himself, and led him to a deep well, where he showed him his own image in the water. Enraged at the sight, the lion flung himself at the image and was drowned.

Among the Santal Parganas, ²⁵—a non-Aryan aboriginal branch of the Kolarian stock of India, inhabiting the eastern outskirts of the Chinta Nagore plateau, about one hundred and fifty miles north of Calcutta—there is a tale which tells how the hares in former days used to feed on men. The men, growing tired at last of such a pest, prayed to Thakur (the god) for deliverance, and the god called up the hare-chief, who denied the charge brought against his people. Then Thakur set the hare to watch the kita tree and the man to watch the korket tree, declaring that whichever should first see a leaf fall from his tree should be allowed to eat the other. The man first saw the leaf fall from his tree, but the hare gnawed off a leaf from his and sought to prevail by trickery. The god, however, soon discovered his deceit, and rubbing his legs with a ball of clean cotton, decreed that thenceforward he should skip about like a leaf blown by the wind, and that men from that time forward should hunt hares wherever they could find them and should kill and eat them, entrails and all. And this is the reason why the Santals do not clean the hares they kill, but devour every part of them entire.

In another story of the Santals, ²⁶ the jackal and the hare steal rice from a woman and play tricks upon one another, the hare holding his own well against the jackal, and sometimes appearing even cleverer than his companion.

²⁴ Wilson, p. 45.

²⁵ *Folk-Lore of the Santal Parganas*, transl. by Cecil Henry Bompas, London, 1909, p. 412.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 338.

In view of the hare's connection with Buddha and the somewhat sacred nature he must have acquired from such association, it seems significant—perhaps more than accidental—that in the folk-lore of those countries where Buddhism flourished the hare holds a place of considerable prominence.

From India, Buddhism spread into Ceylon, where, as has already been shown, the hare in the moon is familiar to the common people, as well as Buddha's connection with it. Introduced thence into Burmah in the fifth century A. D., the religion spread into Tibet in the seventh and eighth centuries. It had already reached China in the beginning of the Christian era, and was carried thence to Korea in the fourth century and thence into Japan in the sixth century. To the west, Buddhist settlements are said to have penetrated as far as the Caspian.

Now in the folk-tales of the Shan mountain country of Burmah,²⁷ the hare appears as a very astute and resourceful beast, surpassing at every turn the fierce but stupid tiger, who is always his dupe. At the beginning of the world—as we are told in one of these tales—the Hare lived on amicable terms with the Tiger, the Ox, the Buffalo, and the Horse, and seems to have been the cleverest of them all. A great fire having broken out in the jungle, the Tiger flees in terror and comes to one friend after another. The Ox and the Horse deliberately direct him into danger, but the Buffalo generously carries him into the river till the fire is burnt out. Chilled by the bath, the Tiger takes refuge with the Hare, who inhospitably sets his own house on fire, driving the Tiger out. Enraged by such an act, the Tiger pursues the Hare, who makes a fool of him at every turn, first causing him to hurt his paws severely on some sharp stones; next to thrust his head into a wasps' nest; then to get bitten by a venomous serpent. Finally, deluding the Tiger into the belief that the sky is falling, the Hare induces him to jump into a pit, into which he himself only a short time before had tumbled. Then, tickling the stupid beast till in desperation the Tiger flings him out, he runs off, brings some men to the pit, and has the Tiger killed.

"Thus did the Hare prove that, though small, she was full of

²⁷ *The Red Miriok*, Anna M. Barnes, and *Shan Folk-Lore Stories*, W. C. Griggs, Amer. Bap. Pub. Soc., Phila., p. 58.

wisdom, and although the Tiger was bigger and stronger and fiercer than she, yet she through her wisdom was able to kill him."

In the folk-tales of Tibet,²⁸ the Tiger is again pitted against the same puny but formidable antagonist, and "Uncle Tiger," as the Hare calls him—surely not out of respect—falls an easy victim to the malicious tricks of "Brother Hare." Having induced "Uncle Tiger" to scrape out and eat his own eyes, and then having caused him in his blindness to topple backwards over a precipice to his death, the Hare, possessed with the demon of mischief, leads a man to forsake his horses in order to secure the Tiger's skin; calls down some ravens to feed on the sore backs of the unprotected horses; incites a boy to desert his sheep in order to rob the ravens' nest; and finally invites a wolf to come and prey upon the defenceless sheep. Then, proceeding to the top of a high hill, and looking down upon the effects of such linked malice long drawn out, he leans back upon a handy stone and laughs with such heartiness that he actually splits his lip. And it has remained split to this very day.

Here we have almost an apotheosis of the rogue, with a very sardonic and Mephistophilian humor.

On another occasion he serves in a similar manner the fox and the wolf together, and then the lion and the lioness. Persuading the fox and the wolf to attempt to strangle a kyang (or wild ass) with a rope, the hare leads them to their destruction, for they become entangled in the rope and are dragged to death by their intended victim. And as in the Hindoo story, the hare incites the lion to spring into the well and drown himself dashing at his own image; and then causes the death of the lioness, whom he coolly informs that he has slain the lion in single combat. In enraged pursuit of the audacious little hare, the lioness gets herself stuck fast in the crevice of a wall and miserably starves to death. Still another borrowing from Indian source appears in the tale in which the hare dresses himself up as an official, pretending to be the special ambassador from the Emperor of China deputed to bring ten wolves' skins as a present to the King of India, and frightens away the wolf, who is about to devour the sheep and her lamb.

²⁸ *Folk Tales from Tibet*, Capt. W. F. O'Connor, London, 1906, Nos. I, VII, IX.

In the Gurian tales of the Trans-Caucasus²⁹ the hare, as in not a few European stories, serves as a messenger between a countryman and his wife, and on account of his cleverness is sold to a credulous merchant for a large sum.

In Korea,³⁰ however, the rabbit (not the hare) is even more important and sustains his usual reputation for cunning and resourcefulness. Brought to the bottom of the sea, supposedly in order to enjoy the subterranean scenery highly praised by the turtle, the rabbit is horrified to hear the fishes discussing the best means of securing his eyes, out of which to make a poultice for their king (a remedy proposed by the wicked turtle himself). Going before the king, the rabbit courteously explains that he will be delighted to serve him and cure him; but that he was accustomed to carry two pairs of eyes, which he used interchangeably, his real ones and a pair made of mountain crystals to be used in very dusty weather. Fearing to injure his real eyes by the trip under water, he had buried them in the sand and was now wearing his crystal eyes. If, however, his majesty would only order the turtle to transport him back up to dry land, he would gladly fetch one of his eyes, which he believed would be sufficient. Pleased with his courtesy, the King of the Fishes commanded the turtle to carry him up at once. On reaching land, however, the rabbit leaped nimbly off the turtle's back, shook the water from his coat, and winking at his clumsy betrayer, told him to dig in the sand himself, for he had only one pair of eyes and he had no intention of parting with either of those.

Besides the Ainu myth of the origin of the hares, the Japanese have an amusing tale of how the hare outwitted the badger, Tanuki, who with his prominent belly plays a leading rôle in all these tales, once beating upon his belly as on a drum and causing all the peasants in the fields to shoulder arms with their farming implements.³¹

Filled with the same spirit of malicious mischief that he has shown in the other tales, the hare sets fire to a bundle of twigs

²⁹ *Georgian Folk-Tales*, transl. by Marjory Wardrop, London, 1894, p. 156.

³⁰ *Korean Tales*, H. N. Allen, Putnam's, 1889, p. 34.

³¹ *Tales of Old Japan*, A. B. Mitford, London, 1893, p. 177; *Volkerkunde in Charakterbildern*, Leo Frobenius, Hannover, vol. 2, p. 32.

which the badger is carrying on his back, and when the badger, hearing the crackling of the twigs, asks the meaning of the sound, the hare reassures him by telling him it is the usual noise of the mountain, which is called "The Crackling Mountain." As the fire burns more fiercely and as the flames begin to pop, the hare answers the badger's renewed inquiries with the explanation that the mountain is called also "The Piff! Paff! Puff! Mountain." Finally, however, the fire singes the neck of the badger, who flees screaming with pain and plunges into the river.

The next day, in pretended sympathy, the hare comes with a plaster for the badger's neck and puts it on the burned spot. But as the plaster is made of cayenne pepper, the badger's suffering is intensified so that he howls in anguish.

Several days later, the hare persuades the badger to set out with him to the capital of the moon. The hare has constructed a boat of hard wood for the journey; but the badger, unwilling to trust himself again to the hare, builds a boat for himself out of clay. Hardly had they started, when the hare drove his boat against the badger's, dashed it to pieces, and thus drowned Tanuki in the river.

This is said to be a well-known story in Japan, often represented in the theatres. The proposed journey to the moon seems to connect it with the Hindoo tales of Buddha.

Though from the examples heretofore given it seems probable, but by no means absolutely certain, that the hare owes his prominence in the folk-tales of Asia to his association with Buddha and to the spread of Buddhism together with its myths and legends, such a theory cannot be applied with any great degree of probability to the folk-tales of Africa, in which both the hare and the rabbit share with the jackal the rôle of hero. Yet between the Buddha birth-stories and the Uncle Remus stories there is one connecting link afforded by the tar-baby episode. In the well-known *Pañcavudha Jataka*, the Bodhisatta, here known as Prince Five Weapons, meets a terrible monster, the Demon with the Matted Hair, or as one translator gives it, the Ogre Hairy-Grip, and makes upon him the same five-fold attack, with hands, feet, and head, as Brer Rabbit does on the tar-baby, with the same humiliating result, finding himself stuck fast and helpless. Now as the tar-baby story is familiar enough in Africa, with many variants, and as the *Sasa (Hare) Jataka*, previously

given in outline, identifies the Bodhisatta with the hare in the moon, Mr. Joseph Jacobs³² supposes that the same identification of the hare with Prince Five Weapons took place among the Buddhists in this tale also; that this primitive tar-baby story was then carried from India to Africa, "possibly by Buddhist missionaries," there spread among the negroes, and thence was brought by the slaves to the New World. "There is certain evidence," declares Mr. Jacobs, "that the negroes have Buddhistic symbols among them." Such evidence, however, does not seem to be easily accessible. Yet so difficult is it to realize how a great body of folk-tales with such clear and striking correspondences to the Asian stories in incident and character could have grown up independently among the African tribes, that one is strongly tempted to favor Mr. Jacobs's theory of Indian origin, especially in view of the additional evidence suggested by him in the apparent connection between the worship of Buddha's foot in later Buddhism,—which, developing doubtless out of the extravagant ceremonial of oriental countries, became a permanent feature in the religion,—and the use of the rabbit's foot among the negroes as a charm or mascot, a clear relic of fetishism.

But whatever the origin of the African tales, the fact remains that the hare (or rabbit) here too is a character of no little importance. Among the Hottentots,³³ for example, there is a story in which the hare appears in the moon, and of which several versions are extant. The story goes that the Moon sent the hare to the earth to inform men that, as she died away and rose again, so should men all die and again come to life. But the hare, either through forgetfulness or malice, told mankind that, as the Moon rose and died away, so should men die but rise no more. When he returned to the Moon and repeated the message he had delivered, the Moon in a rage seized a hatchet and split open his lip (another version says, burnt his lip with a hot stone), thus causing the 'hare-lip,' as it appears to this very day. In retaliation, the hare leaped into the Moon's face and scratched it so severely with his claws, that the scars may still be seen upon its bright surface.

³² *Indian Fairy Tales*, pp. 25; 253.

³³ *Hottentot Fables and Tales*, W. H. I. Bleek, London, 1864, p. 72; *South-African Folk-Tales*, J. A. Honey, Baker and Taylor Company, 1910, pp. 141-146.

This very same tale appears in a collection of Uncle Remus stories, entitled *Uncle Remus and the Little Boy*, issued within the last month by Small, Maynard and Company. The story is called "Brer Rabbit Has Trouble with the Moon," and tells how all the animals at one time living "next-do' neighbors ter de Moon," were greatly disturbed by the fact the "Unc' Moon" was "swinkin' up," and all sought in vain for a remedy. At last the Moon tells Brer Rabbit he wishes to take a holiday, but first must send word to Mr. Man lest he be "skeer'd ter death." Brer Rabbit offers to go for him to Mr. Man, and the Moon, having shown him the way, delivers the following message:

"I'm gittin' weak fer ter be mo' strong; I'm gwine in de shade fer ter git mo' light!"

In one great flying leap, Brer Rabbit reaches the earth, knocks at Mr. Man's door, and tries to say the words given by "Unc' Moon," but states his message as follows:

"I'm gittin' weak; I got no strenk; I'm gwine whar de shadders stay."

Mr. Man, puzzled by such a message, sends back word:

"Seldom seed an' soon forgot; when Unk Moon dies his foots git col'!"

When Brer Rabbit returns with this message, it makes "Unk' Moon" "mighty mad," so that he picks up a shovel and "hit Brer Rabbit on de mouf an' split his lip. Brer Rabbit jump at Unk' Moon wid toof an' claw, an' dar dey had it up an' down. You kin see de marks down ter dis day—Brer Rabbit wid his split lip, an' Unk' Moon wid de scratches on his face."

The story, the same in all essential details as the Hottentot version, is, like many others, evidently imported from an African home, and is, besides, an interesting example of how the mind of primitive man, not in Africa alone, but in all other countries, in groping about to solve some of the simplest phenomena of nature, produced many an interesting myth.

But to return to our hero. Though thus exalted to the moon by the Hottentots in Africa and by the negroes in America, there are scarcely any other instances of deification of the hare in African folk-lore. Indeed, among the Hottentots themselves, though the hare in one story is said to use a cup out of which only his uncle, the lion, and he himself may drink, the favorite rogue

animal is the jackal.³⁴ And on the Slave Coast his rôle as trickster is usually filled by the tortoise (Awon), as it is taken on the Gold Coast by the spider (Anansi), whence are derived the numerous "Nancy" stories of the British West Indies.³⁵

With these exceptions, however, the hare as beast-hero reigns supreme in Africa from coast to coast and from the equator to the Cape. As might be supposed, the elephant,—in the words of Heli Chatelain,³⁶ the collector and editor of Angola tales,—is represented as 'supreme in strength and wisdom,' the lion is strong, but 'not morally noble, nor wise as the elephant'; the hyena appears as a type of 'brutal force and stupidity'; the leopard displays 'vicious power combined with inferior wits'; the fox, or rather jackal, who takes his place, exhibits astuteness; the monkey 'shrewdness and nimbleness'; the terrapin 'unexpected ability'; and the hare, or rabbit, 'prudence, agility, smartness'. It is worthy of note, in passing, that all these animals of the African folk-tales, as far as they appear in Uncle Remus, exhibit exactly the same characteristics as they show in the negro stories of the South.

In the folk tales of Angola, the hare, who occupies a place of no little importance, surpasses the jackal in shrewdness, and has also 'the swiftness and sagacity of the monkey without the latter's frequent recklessness.' Here "Mr." Leopard is the frequent dupe of "Mr." Hare, and constantly falls a victim to his practical jokes. On one occasion, when Mr. Hare is going out with a basket to bind squashes in the field, he meets Mr. Leopard, who laughs scornfully at the little figure with the big basket bigger than the hare himself. In reply to his taunts, and as a proof of his strength, Mr. Hare offers to carry Mr. Leopard himself in his basket. Mr. Leopard accordingly gets in, and Mr. Hare, under the pretence of saving him from a possible fall, ties him securely, then carries him home, flays him and eats him.

Again, acting as self-appointed umpire between Nianga, the hunter, and Mr. Leopard, the hare causes the leopard to return to the tree whence the hunter had released him, and orders Nianga to shoot him. On another occasion, captured by the leopard

³⁴ Macculloch, *The Childhood of Fiction*, p. 39.

³⁵ "Evolution in Folk-Lore," A. B. Ellis, *Pop. Science Monthly*, vol. 48, p. 93.

³⁶ *Folk Tales of Angola* (Mem. Amer. Folk-Lore Soc., vol. I).

along with the monkey, the hare induces the leopard's wife to release him, and then the hare and the monkey, disguised as officers of the Lord Governor, arrest Mr. Leopard, force him to kill his fattest hog and feast them; make him burn his paws in cooking for them, so that his paws are spotted to this day; and at last, adding insult to injury, get off at a safe distance and mock him in his misery.

The jackal, too, who plays hide-and-seek with Mr. Hare, is terribly frightened when he comes upon the hare in a hole, and seeing only the hare's big, staring eyes, runs away in terror, exclaiming, "I, Jackal, oh! I have met an omen! What omen has eyes to look!" In the same way, it may be remembered, Brer Rabbit, in *Uncle Remus*, hides in the mud with only his eyes sticking out and fools Sis Cow after having ignominiously milked her dry.

In the Zanzibar³⁷ tales, on the opposite, or east, coast of Africa, Soongoora, the Hare, and Keeteetee, the Rabbit, are no less officious and meddlesome, and astute and clever in outwitting their enemies. "Now the Hare," says one story-teller of this region, "is the most cunning of all beasts—if you look at his mouth, you will see that he is always talking to himself."

Once, Soongoora, in company with Bookoo, the Rat, climbs into the great calabash tree of Simba, the Lion, steals his honey, and escapes by advising the lion to seize him by the tail and dash him on the ground. At last Simba is forced to admit that he has been fairly beaten and resolves to have nothing more to do with so clever an antagonist.

Keeteetee, the Rabbit, is equally resourceful in time of danger, and like Brer Rabbit is something of a philosopher. Having gone in for a little farming with Simba, the Lion, and Feesee, the Hyena, Keeteetee sets out with them to view their crops, proposing that he who shall stop on the way shall be devoured by the others. Though he himself is the first to violate their agreement, each time he stops he pretends he has paused to think over some profound question; for example, "When people put on new coats, where do all the old ones go to?" His companions are filled with wonder at these questions he propounds, and forbear to eat him. The Hyena, however, thinking to show off his philosophy likewise, fails miserably, and is devoured by the lion. Then the rab-

³⁷ *Zanzibar Tales*, Geo. M. Bateman, Chicago, 1901.

bit, pretending to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors, runs into a cave, proposing that Simba come in after him. The lion tries to follow him, but just as in the Tibetan tale, gets his body stuck fast. Instead, however, of allowing him to starve to death as in the former story, the rabbit climbs upon the lion's back and proceeds to devour him, refusing to accept Simba's cunning advice that he begin his meal at the head. Keeteetee declares he is ashamed to look Simba in the face, and hence he must begin at the other end. At last, having eaten all he could, the rabbit left Simba there to a lingering death and went and became sole owner of the farm and its crops.

The tribes of the Fjort,³⁸ or region of the French Congo, relate a story of the rabbit and the antelope in which the rabbit deceives the antelope (the dupe in most of the tales of this locality), and nibbles up the butter, just as Brer Rabbit does in Uncle Remus. But in this tale the antelope afterwards constructs the figure of an animal about the size of a hare, smears it over with birdlime, catches the rabbit and kills him.

Likewise in the Kaffir folk-tales,³⁹ current among the people living on the western border of Cape Colony, the hare is the most cunning of all the animals, and succeeds in overreaching even a fabulous beast, inkalimeva, who has managed night after night to steal fat from their kraal, though one animal after another has stood guard.

Imported from Africa to the New World by the slaves in their folk-tales, the rabbit still maintains his superiority over the other beasts, and is the hero not of the Uncle Remus stories alone, but of the Bahama tales as well, though in the Jamaican collection of Walter Jekyll⁴⁰ he exhibits no traits of his traditional character. In Bahama, as well as among the Red Indians of North America, the rabbit, however, measures well up to the reputation which in both Asia and Africa he established as a mischief-maker, trickster, and rogue-hero. Just as in Asia his character degenerated from the lofty, pure wisdom and unselfishness of Buddha's spirit incarnate in him, so in North America among the Indians, Michabo, the semi-divine ancestor of the tribes,—he who, like

³⁸ *Folk-Lore of the Fjort*, R. E. Dennett (*Folk-Lore Soc. Pub.*, 1897).

³⁹ *Kaffir Folk-Lore*, Geo. M. Theal, London, 1886, p. 177.

⁴⁰ *Folk-Lore Soc. Pub.*, vol. 55 (1904), p. xxv.

Arthur "slew the beast, and fell'd the forest, letting in the sun,"—fell from his high estate and became a mere vulgar trickster.⁴¹

In popular tales, however, this transition from an omnipotent god working miracles to a sham divinity exhibiting supposedly magic powers, is both easy and natural, and is abundantly illustrated in every age and among every people. In the Middle Ages, for example, the apocryphal tales of Christ's childhood, with their naïve examples of his wonder-working powers while yet a mere infant, arose in response to a natural instinct.

Thus, in the folk-tales of India, Asia, Africa, and North America, the hare, or rabbit, originally a god, degenerated into the popular hero of the beast-epic (though supplanted in Europe by the fox), and in almost every instance exhibits the very same characteristics: lazy, shiftless, greedy, selfish, unscrupulous, cunning, deceitful, boastful, delighting in practical jokes (often of a coarse nature), a leader in all mischief, even diabolical at times, frequently caught in the trap he has prepared for others, but always resourceful, and rarely failing to outwit all the other animals combined and in the end to avoid triumphantly every pitfall placed in his path. Such a character as this must owe its origin to primitive conditions when moral standards were low, and when roguery and trickery were recognized as the best means of getting on in life. It is common enough in the Middle Ages, when Till Eulenspiegel flourished, and others of his kind; and judging from the comic colored supplement, the character, even though robbed of most of its healthy humor and genuine humanity, though degraded to vulgarity and distorted almost beyond recognition, still appears in various shapes and under different names. In spite of all its shortcomings, then, this character of Brer Rabbit as depicted in *Uncle Remus* and in the folk-tales of other countries, is thoroughly human; he is a happy-go-lucky rogue, who lives from hand to mouth, with no thought of the morrow and no sense of responsibility, and who nevertheless comes out always on top. Perhaps that is the very reason why he has been so popular in all ages and in all climes.

JOHN M. MCBRYDE, JR.

The University of The South.

⁴¹ See Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, p. 194.